

Perceptions of intercultural education and the concept of culture among immigrant teachers in Finland

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Introduction

Over the last decade, several scholars have shown great interest in the issues of intercultural learning in teacher education and the development of the intercultural competence of (student) teachers (e.g., Byram 2009; Cushner 2011; DeJaeghere & Zhang 2008; Sercu 2006). There has been much academic discussion in Finland on research subjects that mainly focus on so-called “local” and international student teachers (e.g., Dervin 2015; Dervin & Hahl 2015; Jokikokko 2010; Jokikokko & Järvelä 2013). However, little attention has been paid to immigrant teachers who are permanent residents of Finland. As the number of immigrants in Finland has increased during the past few decades, the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture has promoted teacher education programs for those with a foreign background in order to train better-qualified immigrant teachers. Between 2009 and 2015, 55 Specima teacher education programs were launched at several universities and educational institutions in Finland – the number of participants in the programs grew to 1,300. These programs aim to give teachers with an immigrant background the pedagogical competences required of teachers in Finland. The programs are also designed to encourage immigrants to enter into the Finnish labor market. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2016, 20; Pylkkä 2013, 1.) A report by the Finnish Board of Education stated that, as of spring 2013, 609 immigrants (517 in primary schools and 92 in high schools) were engaged in some kind of teaching activities as teachers (Kumpulainen & Nissilä 2014, 114–115). Acknowledging

the increasing number of immigrants in Finland, it is important to pay closer attention to the necessity of developing an intercultural education curriculum for teachers with immigrant backgrounds.

In this research, we are interested in learning how immigrant teachers and international students describe and conceptualize successful and unsuccessful intercultural education classes. Additionally, we examine how our respondents understand the concept of culture in the context of intercultural education. By analyzing our respondents' perceptions of intercultural education, we aim to frame a picture and provide new insights on how intercultural education and teacher education could be developed in the future. Instead of questioning whether immigrant teachers in Finland meet the European criteria required to be interculturally competent teachers, our purpose in this paper is rather to present a new approach to developing an intercultural education curriculum in the context of teacher education and continuing training in Finland.

More specifically, we aim to answer the following research questions:

- *What factors of success and failure do immigrant teachers and international students associate with an intercultural lecture at school?*
- *How do immigrant teachers and international students describe the concept of culture in the context of intercultural education?*

Intercultural and multicultural education

In many countries in North America and Europe, intercultural and multicultural education has been discussed for several decades in the sphere of educational research and practice (Banks 2004, 5; Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 17–22). In previous studies, the concepts “intercultural” and “multicultural” have been used as adjectives to describe education that promotes an understanding of social justice and respect for cultural diversity. In addition, other adjectives – for example, “global,” “transcultural,” and “cross-cultural” – are applied in the same context (e.g., Dervin & Keihäs 2013, 30; Pitkanen, Verma & Kalekin-Fishman 2006, 17; Portera 2011, 18–24; Timonen & Kantelinen 2013, 259). According to the UNESCO guidelines on Intercultural Education, “intercultural” is defined as “a dynamic concept and refers to evolving relations between cultural groups” and it “results from ‘intercultural’

exchange and dialogue on the local, regional, national or international level". In the same guidelines, "multicultural" refers to a human society consisting not of a single ethnic or national culture, but of linguistic, religious, and socio-economic diversity. (UNESCO 2006, 17.)

The origin of multicultural education is often discussed in relation to the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the subsequent attempts at structural change to defeat discriminatory practices in public services against several minority groups (Banks 2004, 6; Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 13). In the United States, multicultural education has been considered not only an education activity for others, such as ethnic groups or gender minorities i.e., LGBTIQ minorities, but also a holistic reform movement that aims to empower all students to become knowledgeable and thoughtful citizen actors in multicultural societies (Banks 2008, 8). European researchers often use the adjective "multicultural" to refer to a social setting or society in which people from different cultures live peacefully together (Aguado & Malik 2011, 279; Lasonen 2011, 273; Portera 2011, 19–20). In the Finnish context, the term "multicultural education" is discussed generally in relation to education for immigrants or education activities that are implemented at schools with an ethnically diverse student body (e.g., Holm & Londen 2010, 116–117). Moreover, multicultural education in Finland often seems to be conceptually based on cultural relativism (see Holm & Londen 2010, 10). In the framework of cultural relativism, all cultural traditions and differences are equally respected "as they are", and recognition of and respect for cultural diversity are the main educational aims to be pursued (Coulby 2006, 253; Portera 2011, 19). An emphasis on "tolerance" is another key issue in the discussion on multicultural education in the Finnish context. However, the concept of tolerance has been criticized by several scholars, because it allows the educational system to continue on an ethnocentric basis (Holm & Londen 2010, 109; see also Nieto 2009, 251–253). Intercultural education has been developed to cope with the challenges relating to the integration of immigrant students into the societies of different European countries since the 1970s. During the 1980s, the Council of Europe undertook an initiative that further promoted intercultural education among European countries that had a high

immigration flow, such as France and Germany. (Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 17–18; Portera 2011, 21–24.) In the Nordic countries, intercultural education was not a popular research interest before the 1990s (Lasonen 2011, 274).

Some researchers criticize the multicultural approach for lacking a sense of common interest or a willingness to engage in intergroup actions. Instead, they promote an intercultural approach to education that aims to build up a new synthesis of all manner of diversity through dialectical dialogue between people with different cultural backgrounds. (See Portera 2011, 19–21.) However, Holm and Zilliacus (2009, 23–25) have pointed out that it is impossible to conclude there is a difference between the terms “multicultural education” and “intercultural education” because “it depends on which kind of intercultural or multicultural education approach that is referred to” (Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 25). Although we agree with this argumentation and also acknowledge that recently intercultural education and multicultural education have been recognized as interchangeable synonyms by some researchers in this field (see Dervin, Paatela-Nieminen, Kuoppala & Riitaaja 2012; Itkonen, Talib & Dervin 2015), we primarily use “intercultural education” instead of “multicultural education” in the present study for the sake of simplicity. In addition, we want to shed light on the interactive and dynamic nuance of the concept of “intercultural” that aims to go beyond passive coexistence and encourage dialogue between individuals with every kind of difference (see Portera 2011, 17, 20; Jokikokko & Järvelä 2013, 247).

Reconsideration of the concept of culture

“Intercultural” is actually quite ambiguous as a term, because it includes the concept of culture, which is difficult to understand due to its complexity and versatility. Thus, it is necessary to explicitly explain what we mean by intercultural education – that is, what kind of intercultural education will be discussed in the following sections of this paper. In recent years, a growing body of literature on intercultural communication and education has criticized the (neo-)essentialist/culturalist approach, in which the concept of culture is treated as an unchanging and static object. National culture is discussed in a way that sees it dominate every aspect of social life, including

the social structure, behavior, values, and ideology of the people in the nation (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006; Dervin 2010, 159; Holliday 2010, 260–262; Virkama 2010, 41–42). According to Abdallah-Pretceille (2006, 477), there is a risk in the adaptation of (neo-)essentialist theories of culture, because cultural generalization becomes a hindrance to understanding the singular individual. Along with Abdallah-Pretceille, Holliday (2010, 260) claims that cultural generalization might consequently lead to the holistic slander of a culture, in which an unfavorable habit of a single person – such as laziness – “demonizes” the whole culture and the people of the nation.

Recent studies on multicultural and intercultural education have pointed out that it is problematic to emphasize only the differences in national culture and ethnicity, because this might create the dichotomy of the Self and the Other in learners. Those who criticize the strong emphasis on “othering” or “differentiation” in the name of culture claim that besides belonging to the national culture, each individual is diverse in terms of, for example, race, social class, gender, religion, disability, language, and sexual orientation. (Dervin 2015, 73; Holm & Londen 2010, 117; Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 24.) Another risk of emphasizing cultural differences is that it might strengthen a student’s already existing bias toward others (Dervin & Keihäs 2013, 103–109; Portera 2011, 24–25; Virkama 2010, 42).

Based on the above-stated notions of intercultural education, we use the term “intercultural education” in a critical manner in this article. This means that we take conceptual pathways, and by doing so reject essentialist/culturalist approaches to culture. It is also important to point out that this discussion is based on a European perspective, especially critical intercultural theories originating in French academia (Matsumoto 2016, 25). Thus, we shall discuss new approaches to developing intercultural education in teacher education programs primarily in the European – or, more precisely, in the Finnish – context.

Data collection and analysis

The data (n=88) were collected by using the method of empathy-based stories (MEBS). In MEBS, the respondents narrate stories based on frame stories provided by the researcher. These frame stories vary with respect to one factor, which gives the researcher an opportunity to examine how this variation affects the respondents' perceptions (see Eskola & Wallin 2015, 57; Wallin, Helenius, Saaranen-Kauppinen & Eskola 2015, 249). MEBS was chosen as a data collection method in this research because our aim was to examine how the respondents describe culture in a circumstance in which they need to pay attention to class dynamics, the students' interests, their own mental condition (e.g., nervousness), and the contents of the lecture and the pedagogy used in teaching. This method allowed us to encourage the respondents to imagine themselves in the classroom.

The data for analysis in this study is derived from two groups: teachers with an immigrant background (n=50) and international students (n=38). Teachers with an immigrant background are our main group of this present study. In a report by the Finnish Ministry of Education (2007), the concept "*maahanmuuttajataustainen*" (i.e., "immigrant background") is used to describe all persons born abroad who reside in Finland and whose native language is one other than Finnish, Swedish, or Saami. Persons with an immigrant background include, among others, refugees, immigrants, returning Finns, and other foreigners, including asylum-seekers. Persons with an immigrant background also include those born in Finland to parents who were born abroad. (Finnish Ministry of Education 2007, 15) In this study, we use the term "immigrant background" in the same sense as the above-mentioned ministry report. The terms "teachers with an immigrant background" and "immigrant teachers" refer to teachers with an immigrant background who have been engaged in some kind of teaching job as either teachers or other staff members in Finnish schools.

The first – and main – group consists of participants in two teacher education programs. The teacher education program is provided by several universities in Finland, and it is intended for teachers with an immigrant background who do not have the teacher's qualification required by Finnish

law. The program's participants are required to meet Finnish proficiency requirements by achieving the intermediate level (*keskitaso*) in a language test; this corresponds to skill level 4 on the Finnish National Certificates of Language Proficiency (YKI). The respondents are also highly educated: they all hold at least a Bachelor's degree and many of them hold a Master's degree. However, three of the participants were not Bachelor's degree holders; these participants were not aiming to gain a teacher's qualification by taking part in the teacher education program.

The second group consists of international students. We collected the data from international students taking part in two Finnish language courses at a Finnish university in order to compare the empathy-based stories of these two groups. By making the comparison, we examined if there are differences in the answers of these two groups. Further considerations on how differences in educational and career background influence the perceptions of successful and unsuccessful intercultural education can aid teacher educators in understanding both the great assets and the hindrances of teachers with an immigrant background.

During the data collection, we did not ask the respondents any demographic background questions (e.g., age, nationality, citizenship, etc.), because comparison between these background variables was not in the scope of this research. Instead, we explored how the contents of intercultural education and the descriptions of the concept of culture varied among individuals with foreign backgrounds in the Finnish context. The frame stories were written in both English and Finnish on answer sheets with the following structure (the introduction and writing instructions presented in scenario A were also included in scenarios B–D):

- A) One day you were invited to a school as a guest lecturer to an intercultural education class to give students an introduction of your country and culture. After the session, you felt that your lecture was a success. Describe your imaginary lecture on intercultural education: what happened in the lecture? What and how did you tell about your country and its culture?

Eräänä päivänä sinut kutsuttiin vierailevaksi luennoitsijaksi erääseen kouluun esittelemään kotimaatasi ja sen kulttuuria kulttuurienvälisen

kasvatuksen tunnille. Esityksesi jälkeen sinusta tuntui, että luentosi oli onnistunut hienosti. Eläydy tähän tilanteeseen ja kerro mitä luennollasi tapahtui: mitä ja miten kerroit kotimaastasi ja sen kulttuurista?

- B) ... After the session, you felt that the lecture was a failure.
... Esityksesi jälkeen sinusta tuntui, että luentosi oli epäonnistunut.
- C) ... After the session, you felt that your lecture was educative and therefore successful.
... Esityksesi jälkeen sinusta tuntui, että luentosi oli ollut opettavainen ja siksi se oli onnistunut hienosti.
- D) ... After the session, you felt that your lecture was not educative and therefore unsuccessful.
... Esityksesi jälkeen sinusta tuntui, että luentosi ei ollut opettavainen ja siksi se ei onnistunut.

The data were collected by the first author of this paper between December 2016 – February 2017 during several sessions of the teacher education program and the Finnish language course held at two universities in Finland. Prior to the data collection and without revealing the research interests, the researcher gave the informants brief instructions on how to write an empathy-based story. The informants wrote their stories, which varied in length, in approximately 15–20 minutes. They responded with twenty-four (24) A4 pages (line spacing 1.0, font Calibri, font size 11) of raw data. Of the 88 stories, 55 were written in English and 32 in Finnish. One respondent turned in a blank paper.

We applied qualitative content analysis to determine what kind of elements immigrant teachers and international students consider factors of success and failure in a lecture. We examined both the contents of the imaginary lecture and the described teaching methods and activities. Furthermore, in the detailed analysis of the conceptions of culture in the collected stories, we examined what kind of adjectives, personal pronouns, and expressions were used in the respondents' description of their home country and its culture (see Dervin & Keihäs 2013, 134–139). Our particular interest was in examining how the underlying perceptions of culture would rise to the surface in the shape of the participant's discourse and teaching activities.

First, we made an inventory of the contents of the imaginary lecture by conducting interpretative content analysis of the stories written within

scenarios A (a successful lecture) and C (an educative and therefore successful lecture) in order to analyze the success factors of teaching in a context of intercultural education at school. We also compared scenarios A and C written by the immigrant teachers with those written by the international students (see Table 1). Second, to shed light on the failure factors in teaching, we analyzed the empathy-based stories in scenarios B (an unsuccessful lecture) and D (a non-educative and therefore unsuccessful lecture) collected from both groups (see Table 2). Finally, we closely examined the discourses on the concept of culture while taking all the empathy-based stories collected for this research into consideration.

Findings

Success factors

Most of the respondents of both groups ($n=44/54$) answered that the successful lecture included basic information about their country and culture, such as geographical features, food, festivals, and music (see Table 1). This kind of “tourist information” seems to comprise the basic content of their teaching. It is interesting that many respondents used positive adjectives such as “beautiful,” “interesting,” and “awesome” in their descriptions of their country of origin. This finding suggests that for the majority of the respondents, one essential success factor is giving an enjoyable, entertaining session to the audience that will consequently arouse its interest in the different culture.

In terms of the variation within scenarios A (a successful lecture) and C (an educative and therefore successful lecture), there are remarkable differences between the two groups. There was a distinctive difference in the scenarios written by the international students: On the one hand, none of the international students mentioned cultural stereotypes in scenario A (a successful lecture). On the other hand, five international students answered that they would try to break down stereotypes about their home countries and their culture in scenario C (the stories of an educative and therefore successful lecture). However, no significant differences were found between scenarios A

and C written by immigrant teachers: none of the teachers referred to the issue of breaking down stereotypes, for instance, by questioning the cultural bias toward the country and culture. The lack of difference between these two story versions written by the immigrant teachers indicates that the majority of them might not have paid much attention to the word “educative”. Their ignorance of the word might imply that it is not necessary for many of the immigrant teachers to make their lecture educative. Instead of educating their students, they would rather make an effort to entertain them by taking the “festivals, foods and dance approach” to intercultural education (Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 13). Alternatively, they may have considered the lecture to be educative so long as it contained some form of educational opportunity, and that is why there are no observable differences in their stories for scenarios A and C.

Moreover, in order to make the learning experience fun for the students, the immigrant teachers tend to avoid dealing with the controversial and negative issues related to the country, such as stereotypes and political conflicts. As Table 1 illustrates, the immigrant teachers are more reluctant to talk about negative, difficult, and complicated issues (e.g., the political conflicts and economic instability of their country) compared to the international students. However, it is possible that the immigrant teachers, who have experience of working in primary schools, simply considered such difficult and complex issues irrelevant to young schoolchildren.

Table 1. Possible contents of a successful lecture on one's home country and its culture

	Successful lecture (A)	Educative & successful lecture (C)
Immigrant teachers	N=16	N=15
	Tourist information (13)	Tourist information (12)
	Selfintroduction (4)	Selfintroduction (4)
	Multiculturalism (4)	Multiculturalism (4)
	Breaking down stereotypes (0)	Breaking down stereotypes (0)
	National characteristics (2)	National characteristics (3)
	Audience's interests (2)	Audience's interests (1)
	Negative aspects (0)	Negative aspects (0)
International students	N=12	N=11
	Tourist information (11)	Tourist information (8)
	Selfintroduction (5)	Selfintroduction (2)
	Multiculturalism (3)	Multiculturalism (4)
	Breaking down stereotypes (0)	Breaking down stereotypes (5)
	National characteristics (3)	National characteristics (4)
	Audience's interests (1)	Audience's interests (1)
	Negative aspects (4)	Negative aspects (3)

The multiculturalism of the country is one of the most mentioned topics in scenarios A and C in both groups. Some immigrant teachers ($n=8/31$) referred to the multiculturalism of their country of origin and some of them mentioned multi-ethnicity and multilinguality by explaining it as a richness of the society, not as a source of conflict. One teacher with an immigrant background mentioned the possibility and importance of living peacefully in a multicultural society by using the situation of her own country as an example in terms of the diversity of spoken languages and ethnicity:

In Petrozavodsk there are Karelians, Vepsians, Ingrian Finns, and those who came from other areas, such as Armenians, Chechens, Tajiks, Azerbaijanis, Ukrainians, and Belarusians. Every ethnic group is special: every group can preserve its own culture, traditions, lifestyle, and language. These ethnic groups have adjusted well to live together, to respect other groups, and to appreciate the diversity of their own region. In spite of the fact that it is difficult to gain support from the government, people are enthusiastic about retaining their own culture and helping others to preserve theirs. (Translation by the first author.)

In some stories written by both immigrant teachers and international students, there are indications that other important success factors include the aim of promoting students' understanding of cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in society and teaching the importance of respecting diversity in a multicultural society.

When looking at the teaching activities used during the imaginary lecture, almost one-third of the immigrant teachers – in contrast to one-sixth of the international students – answered that they would give weight to interaction with the audience in their teaching. Furthermore, many of the immigrant teachers gave concrete descriptions of the teaching methods and activities they would adopt in the session, as if they felt the need to prove to the researcher that they are pedagogically competent. This finding indicates that the teachers with an immigrant background consider pedagogical competence an important success factor in intercultural education, and that they are confident in their pedagogical skills.

Failure factors

In contrast to the stories describing success factors, the stories that described the failure factors produced very minor differences between the groups, and therefore we do not compare the findings according to the individual groups. There were no significant differences in the findings between scenarios B (an unsuccessful lecture) and D (a non-educative and therefore unsuccessful lecture) either. In addition, many of the respondents described what they did *not* do in the session to explain why the session was unsuccessful. In other words, they listed the success factors they did not do rather than actual failure factors. However, there were still some remarkable findings in the stories that might give indications of the respondents' perceptions of intercultural education at school. Over half of the respondents described the unsuccessful lecture as dull: the students were bored because the teacher lacked pedagogical skills or chose unsuitable topics for the audience (see Table 2). In addition to these internal factors, some of the respondents listed external factors, such as a lack of motivation and concentration among the students, which would lead to the teacher's failure in getting the audience's attention. One respondent wrote:

It doesn't depend on what and how you tell about country or something else; everything depends on the pupils in the class and their motivation as well as the interest in the country and culture.

Some of the respondents also considered a lecture to be a failure when it did not go as planned. Several respondents also stated that to some extent they are concerned about conflicts between the students and the teacher when discussing the cultural differences or political issues of the country in question.

A noteworthy finding was that the essentialist trap in intercultural education was rarely mentioned by the informants of either group. A minority – two respondents from each group – mentioned that cultural stereotyping and generalization could be a failure factor that prevents success in teaching. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents paid close attention to how they could increase the students' interest in the culture or how they could carry out the teaching plan without any mistakes or conflicts. The risk of a strong emphasis on differences, especially between ethnic and cultural differences, was not referred to as a failure factor either (see Table 2), although it is often listed as one of the limitations inherent in implementing intercultural education in schools (see Dervin & Keihäs 2013, 103–109; Holm & Londen 2010, 117; Holm & Zilliacus 2009, 24; Portera 2011, 24–25; Virkama 2010, 42).

Table 2. Unsuccessful lectures and their causes in the context of intercultural education (N=33)

Boring lecture		
	Lack of student interest;	17
	Lack of pedagogical skills;	10
	Knowledge-based	6
Did not proceed as planned		
	Lack of time, preparation;	8
	Misbehavior by the students;	6
	Difficulties in communication	5
Others		
	Conflicts	7
	Nervousness	5
	Lecturer's personality	5
	Stereotyping and generalization	4

Conceptions of culture

In terms of the discourse in the collected empathy-based stories, the data indicates that the concept of culture is understood in various ways among the immigrant teachers and international students. Some of the respondents were not very careful with cultural generalization: for instance, a teacher with an immigrant background explained that there are certain customs that all people use in the country in question:

All neighbors always help you. If someone comes to visit, you have to offer food and the visitor has to eat. That is good manners. In Russia, people always visit one another. (Translation by the first author.)

On the other hand, several of the immigrant teachers stated in their stories that they would acknowledge the limitations of teaching culture as a whole. They believe that in this way, they would be able to avoid cultural generalizations and reject the essentialist approach to intercultural education:

Telling the students that I'm not THE Hungarian, I'm just one Hungarian. (Respondent 1)

I can't tell everything about all cultural and ethnic issues in my home country, because it is a huge nation. (Translation by the first author.) (Respondent 2)

These two writers explained that they would try to talk to the students as individuals rather than as “ambassadors” of their countries and their national culture (Portera 2011, 24).

In connection to this, the following question should be considered: What is the origin of the differences in the understanding of the concept of culture and approaches to intercultural education? One international student gave an interesting answer to this question:

While holding my lecture, it was important to me to give a good overview, without holding onto any stereotypes so that the students could make up their own minds. This is why I tried to base everything I said on research, statistics, and history. This was very important to me as a social science major.

Besides other possible factors – for instance, the age of the immigrant teachers and international students and the countries/cultures in which they grew up – the individual's educational background might affect his/her perceptions

of intercultural education, as the respondent remarked above. However, both groups presented several descriptions of culture that seem to be based on a culturalist approach to interculturality. Thus, we can assume that the question of whether the teacher or lecturer has received a teacher's education does not necessarily play a crucial role in defining the respondent's perception of intercultural education.

Discussion and conclusion

MEBS has proven to be a very useful method for deriving varied perceptions of intercultural education among immigrant teachers and international students. With its multiple variations, the method provided us with an opportunity to examine how immigrant teachers understand the success and failure factors of intercultural education from their own perspectives. However, it is important to acknowledge that the empirical findings in this research are based on a rather small number of stories, and therefore the findings are not generalizable to a wider context. Furthermore, the results derived from empathy-based stories should not be considered a holistic conclusion of how immigrant teachers and international students perceive intercultural education, but rather as an attempt to map out a new and divergent area of research and an effort to provide useful insights into the topic for future research (see Eskola & Wallin 2015, 64).

This study shows that the majority of both immigrant teachers and international students endeavor to arouse the audience's interest in different cultures. In order to succeed in teaching, immigrant teachers and international students strive to present positive images of their home country and culture to the audience. In comparison to the international students, the immigrant teachers also tend to avoid discussions of stereotypes and other controversial and complicated issues related to the country in question. Upon close analysis of the stories collected from the immigrant teacher group, which is also the main group of this study, the findings suggest that many of the immigrant teachers appear to have mastered teaching in terms of pedagogical practice, and because of that, they are able to offer learner-centered activities and encourage

interactions and dialog in the classroom. Their superior pedagogical practice can be considered a great asset in terms of conducting intercultural education. One should take into account the fact that some studies on intercultural issues suggest that immigrant teachers play a facilitator's role, which allows the learners to reflect on their actions and discourses and to promote interaction between individuals with every kind of difference (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006, 480; Dervin 2010, 168–171; Nieto 2009, 249).

Many of the immigrant teachers also revealed to their students their positive positions on diversity and cultural differences by referring to the situation in their home countries. One of the teachers clearly stated that she would emphasize the importance of peaceful coexistence in which people with cultural and linguistic differences live together and show mutual respect for one another's historical background. In general, the findings suggest that the immigrant teachers and international students try to teach different cultures in order to produce tolerance towards Others (see UNESCO 2006, 18). This finding has interesting implications for developing intercultural education in teacher education and the training curriculum: some factors derived from the stories of a successful lecture on intercultural education overlap with the theory of multicultural education in Finland, which leans on the principle of cultural relativism. It is therefore evident that some of the teachers are to some extent familiar with theories of multicultural education, yet their perception is limited – they might not be well aware of recent discussions on multicultural and intercultural education. Taking into account the finding that many of the immigrant teachers are still caught in essentialist theories of culture in regard to their perceptions of intercultural education, there is a definite need for immigrant teachers – and also teacher educators – to rethink and advance the discussion on the use of the concept of culture.

While acknowledging the continuously increasing scale of transnational migration and flows of people, ideas, and information across national borders (Faist, Fauser & Reisenauer 2013, 1), intercultural education that applies an essentialist view to culture is not accurate in an era of cultural hybridity (Portera 2011, 14; Virkama 2010, 43). It is essential that the educators understand that multicultural and intercultural education is not only for

immigrant students but for all students regardless of their background. Moreover, in societies affected by globalization, such as Finland, educators are not only native Finnish teachers and teacher educators; there are also teachers with an immigrant background.

Finnish teachers and teacher educators need to acknowledge the assets and hindrances of teachers with an immigrant background regarding intercultural education – these are explained in detail in the previous sections of this paper. Furthermore, the thematic and theoretical frameworks of multicultural and intercultural education taught in the context of immigrant teacher education in Finland need to be linked more firmly to the wider academic area to include fields such as social science and comparative education (see Coulby 2006, 254; Holliday 2010, 264; Portera 2011, 21). This constitutes a new approach to intercultural education in the context of immigrant teacher education in Finland. Through this new approach, teachers with an immigrant background are able to enhance the contents of their “toolbox” in order to cope with various challenges and meet the varied needs of different students in a culturally diverse classroom. Immigrant teachers are not only those to be educated but also those who possess many opportunities to broaden teacher educators’ perspectives on intercultural education. Therefore, we may conclude that immigrant teachers can play a key role in promoting intercultural education for the benefit of all students in the schools of Finland.

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